DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 336 **FL 011 128**

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TITLE	French Gender "Rules" in the Speech of English-Dominant, French-Dominant and Monolingual French-Speaking Children. Working Papers on Bilingualism, No. 19.
INSTITUTION	Ontario Inst. for Studies in Education, Toronto. Bilingual Education Project.
PUB DATE	Oct 79
NOTE	28p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Bilingual Education Project, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M561V6
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Bilingualism; Child Language; *English; *French; *Grammar; Immersion Programs; Language Dominance; Language Proficiency; Language Research; Linguistic Theory; *Monolingualism; Second Language Learning; *Sex Differences
IDENTIFIERS	*Gender; Quebec

ABSTRACT

The French gender usage of grade two and grade five Franco-Ontarian children was compared with that of English-speaking children enrolled in French immersion programs, and monolingual French-speaking children in Quebec. While some of the Franco-Ontarian children are similar to the Quebec children with respect to the gender "rules" they appear to be following, others make errors that resemble those of the English-speaking second language learners. It is suggested that a key factor in determining how well the Franco-Ontarian children have mastered French gender is whether French or English is the dominant language of communication between parents and the children at home. For English-dominant children, some directions for remedial action in the school are proposed. (Author)

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French Gender 'Rules' in the Speech of English-Dominant, French-Dominant and Monolingual French-Speaking Children

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Introduction

It is well known that English speakers learning French as a second language have considerable difficulty mastering grammatical gender in French. In contrast, it has been pointed out (Tucker et al., 1968:312) that "French speakers, including very young children, seem to have no difficulty with gender, even with the gender of novel nouns." In his longitudinal study of two young children acquiring French as their mother tongue, Grégoire, too, finds that gender is easily acquired in early childhood. He remarks that already during the children's third year "le genre aura acquis une position solide," and that, in general, "le nombre des exemples où le genre est réellement fautif demeure très réduit." (Grégoire, 1947:39-40,44).

What of the French-speaking child brought up in an environment where English is the majority language? Does this child, who may speak French with parents at home but soon learns to speak English with playmates, have difficulties with French gender that resemble those of the English-speaking learner of French as a second language? Or is he indistinguishable in his use of gender from monolingual Francophone children in an overwhelmingly French-speaking environment? The purpose of this paper is to investigage these questions through an empirical study of speech data obtained from interviews with children in several different language learning settings in Ontario and Quebec.

Before describing the empirical study, it is appropriate to consider just what is involved in grammatical gender in French, and what differences may exist between Canadian usage on the one hand, and 'standard French' (as exemplified by the Petit Larousse (1959) and Grevisse (1975)) on the other. This involves a brief review of some existing studies of French gender.

Overview of Studies of French Gender

Most nouns in modern French, whether they refer to animate beings or inanimate objects, can be categorized as belonging unambiguously to one of two grammatical classes, or 'genders': masculine or feminine. Thus fauteuil is invariably masculine, and chaise, feminine. Among nouns with animate referents, there is generally a close correspondence between male sex and masculine gender, and between female sex and feminine gender, where humans or domestic animals are concerned. Thus homme and taureau are both semantically male and grammatically masculine, while femme and vache are both female and feminine. This correspondence between sex and gender, of obvious assistance to the language learner, is by no means perfect, however (see, e.g., Spilka, 1976, for an illuminating discussion), with lesser or exotic animals often being invariably masculine or feminine in gender (le ver, le

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putois, le crocodile, la grenouille, la souris, la panthère) whether or not their referents are male or female in sex. Even with respect to human referents, a feminine noun may on occasion refer to a male individual (la sentinelle), or more frequently, a masculine noun to a female individual, particularly in occupations traditionally filled by males (le docteur, le dentiste). The tendency to equate sex and gender is apparently quite strong among French speakers, however, as indicated by Guiraud who reports with respect to the popular French spoken in the Paris region that:

> Lorsque le nom désigne un être vivant sexué, le français populaire rétablit le genre sémantique et dit un ordonnance, un clarinette (un joueur de clarinette), il a été le dupe dans cette affaire.
>
> (Guiraud, 1973:18)

It seems justified, therefore, to talk in terms of a general 'rule' (with notable exceptions) mapping sex onto gender in French. The existence of such a rule is given further confirmation by the fact that there are other nouns which have what is generally known as 'common' gender, meaning that they can be treated as either masculine or feminine, depending on the sex of the referent (e.g., enfant, garde-malade, secrétaire). In Canadian French, common gender has been extended to a number of nouns which do not have this characteristic in standard French. For example: dinde, oie, âne (Barbeau, 1970:241).

Lyons (1968) points out that except for such common nouns, and formally related sets of words such as chien:chienne and lion:lionne, grammatical gender distinctions in French are generally redundant. This is true for pairs such as garçon:fille (which are already clearly distinct in phonetic shape) and even for homonyms which are distinguished only by their gender. As Lyons indicates:

> Although the occurrence of le rather and la with mousse would be sufficient to resolve any potential ambiguity between 'cabin boy' and 'moss', it seems clear that the two words would rarely be used in the same context. The functional load of the difference in gender is therefore negligible... This would seem to be true of most pairs of homonyms that have a different gender in French.
>
> (Lyons, 1968:287)

Lyons would thus reject the notion implied, for example, by the Grammaire Larousse (Chevalier et al., 1964:164) that gender is 'useful' for distinguishing homonyms in French.[1] Instead he argues convincingly that gender concord is essentially a 'surface structure' phenomenon, with the pronominal function of gender being the most important in communication. In fact, it appears that in pronominal usage the sex, or 'natural' gender, of the referent takes precedence, on occasion, over the grammatical gender of the associated noun, so that sentences of the following type may be produced: elle est belle, le nouveau professeur. As Lyons points out, in such a case: "Neither Le nouveau professeur est beau (which necessarily refers to a man) nor *Le nouveau professeur est belle (which is ungrammatical) is possible." Thus the sentence type elle est belle, le nouveau professeur resolves a clash between natural and grammatical gender. Lyons concludes that grammatical gender is "dominant within the noun phrase" while natural gender "may prevail in pronominal reference and for concord with the predicate." (Lyons, 1968:287)

Some analysts of French gender have tended to assume that although gender is an inherent property of the noun, it is signalled mainly, if not exclusively, by concord in accompanying forms such as articles, adjectives and pronouns. It has already been noted, however, that a pronoun does not necessarily have to agree in grammatical gender with its associated noun. Also it is clear that inanimate objects (and in popular varieties of French on both sides of the Atlantic, humans, too) may often be referred to by the pronoun ce or ça, which gives no clue as to the gender of the associated noun. At the same time, it is important to point out that the extent to which adjectives signal gender distinctions is considerably less in oral French than in written French. As Rigault (1971:85) indicates, some written feminine forms are pronounced the same as the masculine (joli-jolie, vrai-vraie, cher-chère, net-nette) while other common adjectives are not distinguished even in writing (rapide, pauvre, sage). In addition, before a noun beginning with a vowel, the feminine adjectival form generally prevails in oral French (un [bɔn] éléphant, mon [pətit] ami). At times even the article is not helpful for determining gender, as when it is elided before a vowel (l'accent, l'ivoire), or in the plural (les maisons). Notwithstanding these reservations as to the helpfulness of pronouns, articles and adjectives in signalling grammatical gender in oral French, Grégoire clearly believes that they are the only real clues to gender for young children learning French as their mother tongue:

> Le genre des substantifs n'est pas inscrit en général sur leur physionomie phonétique. Le grammairien pourrait parfois l'entrevoir en se rapportant à la signification des mots dits du genre animé et de quelques autres catégories, ou bien à certains suffixes dont les substantifs sont pourvus. L'enfant, au début, ne sera averti du genre que grâce 1^{e} aux articles, du moins dans une part de leurs formes "la", "une", mais pas dans "les", "des", ni dans "l'" (l'eau, l'arbre); 2^{e} à ceux des adjectifs qui possèdent une forme féminine ("forte", "lasse", "sèche", etc.); 3^{e} à plusieurs pronoms de la 3^{e} personne, "il", "ils", "elle", "elles", "eux" "lequel", "laquelle", à "celui", "celle"; 4^{e} aux participes présents employés comme adjectifs. Les participes passés n'entrent que partiellement en jeu, car leur orthographe, en général est en désaccord avec leur prononciation réelle, par exemple "aimée", "finie", "reçue", "rendue", etc.
>
> (Grégoire, 1947:39)

In Le Bon Usage, Grevisse offers "Quelques règles pour reconnaître le genre de certains noms," but he is somewhat diffident about doing so, stating that:

> Ce n'est guère que par l'usage que l'on apprend à reconnaître le genre des noms. Il y a cependant, pour les noms des choses, quelques règles générales qui, en dépit des exceptions qu'elles comportent, peuvent fournir des indications utiles.
>
> (Grevisse, 1975:223)

He goes on to list a number of masculine and feminine suffixes for inanimate nouns and to provide some semantically oriented rules (with exceptions), indicating, for example, that names of metals, chemicals, and scientific names of plants and animals are masculine, as are most names of trees, languages, days of the week, months and seasons, while nouns designating sciences tend to be feminine.

Others have taken a more optimistic position on the issue of how gender is signalled in French, suggesting that the phonetic form of the noun itself does often serve as an indication of its gender. Rather than arriving with Grevisse and others at "the rather discouraging conclusion that noun endings are of limited value and are generally unreliable indicators of gender," Tucker et al. conducted a psychological experiment from which they reported findings strongly suggesting that noun endings (not just suffixes) "reliably mark gender, in particular instances, and that the initial syllables also have an influence, although probably a less powerful one." (1968:313-314) The experiment in question involved asking over 400 French-speaking Montreal children in Grades 4-7 to determine the gender of 84 real and invented nouns. Half the subjects received the words orally, and the remainder by an oral-graphic procedure. Of fourteen endings studied, five were found to be statistically reliable markers of masculinity (-ais, -eur, -illon, -oi, -oir) and three were found to be statistically reliable feminine markers (-ssion, -stion, and -(a)tion). In addition, -aie was found to indicate masculine when presented orally but feminine when presented oral-graphically. These findings corresponded closely with a statistical count of endings of nouns in the Petit Larousse (1959). For example, where the subjects overwhelmingly chose masculine as the gender of a particular noun, it was found that nouns with the ending in question were either invariably, or very often, masculine in the Petit Larousse (-illon, 64M, 1F; -ais 70M, 0F; -oir, 220M, 0F; -eur 1482M, 78F; -oi, 148M, 10F). Where the subjects were uncertain about a particular ending (e.g. -é, -eé, -oire, -eure, and -oie), it was found that the distribution of masculine and feminine gender for nouns with such endings in the Petit Larousse was divided. The authors conclude, in contrast to Grégoire, that:

> In the case of first-language learning, it seems apparent that the French child is able to distinguish and utilize, by induction, from the recurring regularities in the language, those patterns of cues that mark gender. He appears to be very skilled in generalizing from these patterns to novel occurrences.
>
> (Tucker et al., 1968:315)

Significantly, the authors also note that exceptions to the gender cues "usually are frequently occurring monosyllabic nouns in the French language." They suggest, with respect to the second language learner, that these nouns "can be relatively easily learned as separate items" (p. 316), while, in general:

> It should be possible to make the problem of gender acquisition a much easier one simply by structuring the manner of presenting vocabulary lists. For example, words with distinctive ending and beginning characteristics can be congregated so that the regularities will be highlighted.[2]
>
> (Tucker et al., 1968:316)

As a test of this hypothesis, Tucker et al. went on to experiment with explicit gender training for FSL students at the university level. The results of a pilot program were suggestive that "a pattern of vocabulary presentation for the non-native which draws upon regular features of the language will be most beneficial in terms of his acquiring the ability to make gender assignments." (Tucker et al., 1977:61). This view is echoed by Rivers in her Practical Guide to the Teaching of French, in which she comments:

> The regular relationships between many noun endings and the gender of the noun are frequently not made clear to students, yet they can provide a considerable shortcut to the mastery of this troublesome feature. It is also reassuring to students to know that the gender of a new noun is not completely unpredictable.
>
> (Rivers, 1975:246)

Tucker et al.'s (1968) conclusions are partly based on orthographic cues, but in a later article, Rigault (1971) presents a statistical analysis of noun endings in Le Petit Larousse based on their oral form alone. He finds that it is important to consider more than the final phoneme of the noun, indicating that:

> certaines ambiguités se résolvent au fur et à mesure que la terminaison prend du volume. Par exemple, 70,4 pour 100 des noms du Petit Larousse se terminant par [ɔ̃] sont féminins, mais la proportion s'élève à 91,5 pour 100 pour les noms terminés par [jɔ̃] et respectivement à 99,8 pour cent pour les noms terminés par [sjɔ̃] et [zjɔ̃]. Les autres terminaisons diphoniques consonne + [ɔ̃] se trouvent dans des noms masculins dans 97,1 pour 100 des cas. Toutes les terminaisons ne donnent pas malheureusement des proportions assez nettes; par exemple, [ɔn] : 48F/46M, [yl] : 89F/70M. Il n'en demeure pas moins qu'un grand nombre de terminaisons orales sont de bons indices du genre grammatical.
>
> (Rigault, 1971:81-82)

The generalizations made by Tucker et al. and Rigault concerning noun endings (see also Tucker et al. (1977) for a more detailed account of findings) refer to currently existing regularities -- even, perhaps, productive rules -- in the French language. It is interesting to note, at the same time, that those endings they find characteristically masculine or feminine were in origin often already so in the Latin of roughly 2,000 years ago from which modern French nouns are mainly borrowed or derived (e.g. NATIONEM (f.) > la nation, LIGATIONEM (f.) > la liaison). A historical perspective helps to illuminate certain other tendencies with respect to gender that appear to exist in modern French, and that have been noted in the popular spoken French of the Paris region -- le français populaire (Bauche, 1928; Guiraud, 1973).

Classical Latin, as is well known, actually had three genders ---masculine, feminine and neuter, but these had already been reduced to two (masculine and feminine) during the Vulgar Latin period of roughly 200 BC to 600 AD. The gender of most modern French nouns can be traced back to Vulgar Latin origins (see e.g. Ewert, 1943; Pope, 1934). The characteristic feminine -a(m) ending of Latin was gradually reduced to schwa in old French and during the 16th century this final schwa (which still remains in written French as -e) was dropped in spoken French. But the final [ɔ] had the effect of protecting and maintaining the preceding consonant, which was in contrast not retained in the pronunciation of many masculine nouns (e.g. PLANTA(M) > (la) plante [plãt] beside PONTE(M) > (le)pont [pɔ̃]; GRANA > (la) graine [grɛn] beside GRANU(M) > (le) grain [grɛ̃].[3]

These quite regular phonetic developments have created a situation in which, as Guiraud points out in Le Français populaire, some nouns in popular

French have even changed gender in line with the general tendency according to which:

> les mots à finale consonantique tendent à prendre le genre féminin, cependant que les mots à finale vocalique tendent à prendre le masculin.
> (Guiraud, 1973:32)

This tendency, he finds, is:

> renforcée par la forme de l'initiale, qui fait que tout mot commençant par une voyelle et terminé par une consonne est le plus souvent du féminin en français populaire où on dit: l'air elle est fraîche, l'appel est faite, etc.

A phonetic development in 16th century French helps to explain why nouns beginning with a vowel should have become particularly susceptible to feminization if they ended with a consonant in spoken French. Whereas in the Old French of the 12th and 13th centuries vowels followed by a nasal consonant had become nasalized, towards the 16th century a tendency had developed to nasalize such vowels if they were followed by intervocalic [m], [n], or [ñ]. Added to the already mentioned tendency at that time for final [ə] to be dropped, this meant that the indefinite articles un and une followed by a word beginning with a vowel were probably for a time pronounced identically, perhaps [ön] (Guiraud, 1973:31-2), although Ewert (1943:66, 137) suggests [ɔ̃n], assuming that they were identical before denasalization but after final schwa had been lost. Whichever is the case, the neutralization of un and une meant that one clue to the gender of the noun in question would have been lost. At the same time the definite article, being elided, would not have provided any clue either. Thus the shape of the noun ending itself may well have taken on even greater importance in signalling gender than might otherwise have been the case. In any event, it is noted by Bauche in 1929 that:

> sont féminins en LP (langage populaire) un certain nombre de substantifs masculins en français qui commencent par une voyelle ou un h muet et finissent par une consonne prononcée où une terminaison féminine; sauf, bien entendu, ceux qui représentent un être masculin (e.g. un instituteur, un arabe, un opérateur).

Bauche, who notes that this 'rule' is not absolute, includes the following list of examples:

> air, alcool, amour, appel, éther, éventail, exercice, héritage, hippodrome, hôtel, obstacle, obus, omnibus, orage, ouvrage, ulcère, usage, ustensile. (Bauche, 1929:89-90)

As Guiraud points out:

> On remarquera qu'il s'agit de termes d'usage courant, pour la plupart d'origine populaire, et dont le genre devrait être connu; ce qui atteste bien l'existence d'une loi phono-morphologique et non une simple faute sur le genre d'un mot savant, inconnu.
> (Guiraud, 1973:32-33)

At the same time, we find Grevisse (1975:229-33) presenting long lists of nouns "dont le genre est à remarquer" because people often hesitate over their gender. Many of these nouns, it may be noted, begin with a vowel

or a silent h and end in a consonant phoneme in oral French.

It is perhaps not surprising to find that Guiraud's 'règle' with respect to gender in 'le français populaire' also appears to apply in Canadian French, in reference to which Barbeau comments that:

> Sans que cela soit une règle générale, les substantifs commençant par une voyelle ou un H muet et finissant par une consonne prononcée ou une terminaison féminine sont considérés comme étant féminins.
>
> (Barbeau, 1970:239)

Similar comments are made by Orkin (1970:79). Particularly interesting in light of the 16th centurey neutralization of un and une mentioned above is the following observation from Barbeau:

> Lorsqu'ils sont précédés de l'article un (prononcée eun) certains noms féminins deviennent masculins. C'est le cas de: ETABLE - AFFAIRE - ECHARPE - HORLOGE - IMAGE - ARAIGNEE - ONCE - ARMOIRE - OREILLE - ECURIE - AUTRUCHE - ETOILE - AUGMENTATION - HELICE - IDEE - ORANGE. Ces mêmes noms séparés de l'article reprennent leur genre. Ex.: Un armoire - Une vieille armoire - Un orange - une petite orange.
>
> (Barbeau, 1970:239)

One is bound to raise the question as to whether the 'eun' pronunciation that Barbeau mentions is really 'masculine', rather than a continuation of the pre-vocalic neutralization noted in 16th century European French.

Barbeau also draws attention to a few 'particularities' of Canadian Fench gender (e.g. la minuit, une été) and some original feminine noun formations such as une avarde, une cochonne, une acteuse, but it is noteworthy that differences of gender from standard French are in fact relatively few. Passing mention is also made of loanwords from English which in Canadian French may become either masculine or feminine in gender. Two main factors appear to be involved in determining what gender a loanword will take: (a) the gender of a noun with similar meaning in French (e.g. tèpe is masculine probably by analogy with ruban gommé); (b) whether the loanword ends in spoken French in a vowel or a consonant (e.g. dump, rail bouze are feminine, while barli is masculine.)

In summing up this overview of studies of French gender, it is important to point out that even those who have stressed that formal clues as to the gender of the noun often exist in the noun itself, do not claim that such clues are an infallible guide. Clearly there are many common (especially monosyllabic) items of vocabulary whose gender, for one historical reason or another, conflicts with the general trend (e.g. main and eau are feminine though they end in a vowel, while monde, ending in a consonant phoneme, is masculine). For many other such exceptions, however (e.g. homme, fils), there is apparently a semantically oriented rule which indicates that higher animated beings should be classified according to their sex. Nevertheless, it would appear that there is a residue of nouns which do not comply with either a semantic or phonological regularity of some kind. In order to master the gender of these nouns, it appears that the learner has only the clues provided by articles, adjectives, pronouns, etc. to fall back on. Given the relative frequency of most such exceptions, however, it seems reasonable to assume that this is not an unmanageable memorizing task for

the language learner exposed to a sufficient amount of everyday French in a natural environment.

Before turning to the empirical study of the use of gender by various groups of Canadian children, one more important aspect of French gender should be mentioned. That is: there appear to be more masculine than feminine nouns in the language. According to Tucker, Lambert and Rigault (1977), for example, 61% of the nouns in the Petit Larousse (1959) are masculine. It is also briefly noted by Grégoire that the children he observed in France started by preferring masculine gender (Grégoire, 1947:39). This suggests that masculine may be an 'unmarked' form in French, while feminine is 'marked' (Lyons, 1968:79). This is certainly the case in particular instances. The pronoun il, for example, is always selected as the quasi-neuter subject place-holder in locative and meteorological expressions such as: il y a, il fait beau, il pleut. Likewise, 'masculine' le is the object pronoun used to refer to events or objects unspecified as to gender (e.g. Elle était morte, mais Jean ne le croyait pas.) Similarly, the masculine form of the adjective is the one used in the predicate, when the subject is the non-specific ce (C'est beau; ça, c'est idiot). In addition, in the 3rd person plural ils refers to a group of individuals or objects of mixed masculine and feminine gender (as well as an exclusively masculine collection of animate or inanimate objects), while in standard French elles only is used to refer to an exclusively feminine collection. Moreover, the masculine noun form used for a higher animate being, where both masculine and feminine forms exist (e.g. lion: lionne; cheval: jument) is often used more generally to refer to both sexes. This is not the case with the feminine noun which in such instances can only refer to a female being.

In discussing the findings of the study of Canadian children, we shall keep in mind the various trends that have been cited in order to see whether the non-standard variants that are used by the various groups of children are in conformity with such trends, i.e. whether they are systematic, or whether they appear to be purely random erros.

The Empirical Study

The empirical study involves an examination of interview data from eight groups of children, four at the Grade 2 level (approximately 7 years old) and four at the grade 5 level (approximately 10 years old), in four different localities: Toronto, Sudbury and Rayside in Ontario. and Quebec City in the Province of Quebec.[4] The distribution of the 55 subjects and some of their personal characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

The Toronto children are of English-speaking middle to upper middle class home background and neighbourhood in an overwhelmingly Anglophone wider environment. They have been enrolled, however, since Kindergarten in a French immersion program in which all instruction for the first two years of schooling takes place in French. In Grade 2, a daily one-hour period of English language arts is introduced and is gradually expanded at higher grade levels, so that about half the school-day is in French by the Grade 5 level.

The city of Sudbury has a sizeable minority of French-speaking inhabitants (27% of French mother tongue, according to the 1971 census), and the

Table 1

Distribution of Subjects

and Personal Characteristics

A. Grade 2

	Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury	Rayside	Quebec
Total no. of subjects	11	6	7	6
No. of boys	6	3	4	4
Social class background and language dominance*	IE	IE (2) IF (1) IIF (1) IIF (1) IIIF (1)	IF (2) IIF (2) IIIF (3)	IF (2) IIF (3) IIIF (1)

B. Grade 5

Total no. of subjects	5	7	6	7
No. of boys	2	4	3	3
Social class background and language dominance*	IE	IF (2) IIF (1) IIE (1) IIF/E (1) IIIF (1) IIIE (1)	IF (2) IIF (3) IIIF (1)	IF (2) IIF (2) IIIF (3)

* Class: I -- relatively high, II -- middle, III -- relatively low

Language dominance: E -- English dominant, F -- French dominant

F/E -- equal use of French and English

Figures in brackets represent the number of subjects pertaining to each category.

Sudbury children interviewed come from home backgrounds of varied SES in which at least one parent is native French-speaking. These children are attending a French language elementary school. Most of the children report in their interviews that they speak English at least part of the time with friends in the school playground and with playmates outside school, and that they watch mainly English language programs on television. Based on the language that they use at home with parents, these children can be divided roughly into two groups: those whose dominant language of communication in the home is French, and those whose dominant language of communication is English.[5] At the Grade 2 level half the children use more English than French with their parents, and the other half use more English, while at the Grade 5 level, the majority use more French (with one child considered to be using roughly equal amounts of French and English).

In the town of Rayside, Ontario, French speakers are actually in a majority (64% of the population reported French as their mother tongue in the 1971 census), but in the wider environment English is still the dominant, or 'unmarked' language (in Fishman's (1976) terminology). As they report it, the Rayside children of French-speaking home background ranging from high to low SES who are attending French elementary school still tend to watch English television, and to speak some English, at least with their friends, though apparently to a lesser extent than their peers in Sudbury. All the children in the Rayside groups have been judged to have French as their dominant language of communication based on their language usage with parents. In light of this fact, and the numeric superiority of native French-speakers in Rayside as a whole, it seems a fair assumption that their environment is altogether more French than it is for the Sudbury children.

The Quebec City children's contact with English is in general quite limited. They have been brought up and educated in an overwhelmingly French-speaking environment, and though the Grade 5 children are studying English as a second language in school and some of them may have visited English-speaking resorts on holidays, they can be regarded as virtually monolingual in French.

Except for the sessions with the Grade 2 immersion children, the individual interviews with the various groups of children were of the same general nature, with a native French-speaking interviewer asking questions about topics of general interest to the children. In the Grade 2 immersion interviews, the focus was on a series of cartoons which the children were asked to describe. The interviews with the immersion children, and particularly Grade 2 immersion, were shorter than those of the other groups.

It should be stressed that the gender data to be presented here are based on existing transcripts which are taken at their face value. The procedure adopted was to examine the available transcripts of the interviews and note any differences in gender from standard French usage. Certain dialectal features were, however, ingnored. Such features are the use of the form [t: t] in both masculine and feminine contexts: e.g. [t: t] les autres animaux (from a Quebec interview). This particular feature can hardly be regarded as an error of gender since it appears to be a quasi-invariant form for a number of the native French-speaking children and is frequently used by adult French-speaking Quebeckers. The same comment

applies to the use of [f t] as an invariant past participle of faire. Another feature that has regretfully not been included from the interviews with the Sudbury, Rayside and Quebec children is the occurrence of the indefinite article before a vowel, owing to the distinct possibility that there may be neutralization of masculine and feminine in such instances, which requires detailed phonetic analysis. That such neutralization may be taking place is suggested by a number of surprising 'errors' in the Quebec transcripts before the adjective autre (e.g. un autre matante, un autre maison beside forms such as ma matante and la maison in the same interviews). The examination of this interesting phenomenon would provide a fascinating mini-study in itself, particularly in light of the historical developments described earlier.

Table 2 summarizes the number of non-standard variants (apart from those mentioned in the preceding paragraph) used by children in the various groups. In this table, the absolute number of non-standard variants is indicated as a proportion of the total number of instances where a gender choice was made during the course of the interview.[6] It is clear from the table that the immersion children have substantially more non-standard gender variants in their speech (16.9% for the Grade 2 children and 20.9% for the Grade 5 children) than do the English-dominant children in Sudbury (10.5% in Grade 2 and 10.2% in Grade 5), who in turn have more such variants in their speech than do the French-dominant children in either Sudbury, Rayside, or Quebec City. From a numerical point of view, it seems that there is virtually no difference between French-dominant children in Sudbury and those who live in Rayside or Quebec in a wider environment which offers greater support for French. This would suggest that, at least in the area of gender, it is possible to achieve native-like control even in a minority situation. However, the fact that the English-dominant Sudbury children are not as nativelike in their use of gender as their French-dominant peers suggest that parental support for the language in a minority situation needs to be exercised at home as well as through the school. Indeed Hébrard and Mougeon (1975) and Mougeon (1979) have come to the conclusion that the language spoken by parents with their children in the home is a crucial factor in the children's language acquisition in a bilingual milieu. Further studies by Mougeon and Bélanger (1979) of the overgeneralization of the demonstrative pronoun celle, and by Béniak, Mougeon and Côté (1979) of the omission of reflexive pronouns reveal a similar pattern to the present study in distinguishing between Franco-Ontarian children on the basis of their language use with parents.

Table 2

Use of non-standard variants as % of total gender choices made

	Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Quebec
Grade 2	16.9% (128/759)	10.5% (98/937)	0.8% (4/509)	1.4% (19/1326)	1.2% (25/2081)
Grade 5	20.9% (129/617)	10.3% (26/254)	0.8% (7/836)	1.8% (28/1564)	0.6% (12/2057)

Table 2 shows no development between grade levels. However, it is also important to consider what qualitative differences there may be between the types of non-standard variants used by each of the groups. It is revealing to start by categorizing these variants, as far as possible, by reference to the various trends noted earlier in the survey of gender studies. This can be done by stating such trends in simplified form as hypothetical general rules. We can then see how often these rules are contravened by the various groups in a way that creates deviations from standard French.

Rule 1. *Higher animate beings of male sex are realized as masculine in gender, while female beings are realized as feminine in gender. With a group of referents of mixed sex, the plural pronoun realization is in the masculine.*

Rule 1 appears to be contravened much more often by the Grade 2 immersion children (despite the comparative brevity of their interviews) than by any other group. Table 3 shows the total number of non-standard deviations from this 'rule' incurred by each group. It also indicates that, for all groups, there is a definite tendency to overgeneralize the masculine gender to female referents (rather than vice versa), a tendency which it appears may be encouraged by various features of standard French noted earlier (e.g. the predominance of masculine nouns in general, the unmarked status of masculine gender, the use of ils to refer to mixed males and females, and the use of masculine nouns such as le docteur to refer to both males and females.) Thus it appears that the direction of the deviations from Rule 1 shows a certain amount of systematicity in all groups. On the other hand, the Grade 2 immersion children also have forms such as sa frère and elle n'aime pas (male ref.) in their speech, which would seem to be random exceptions to Rule 1.[7] While the other goups also occasionally overgeneralize feminine forms to male referents, it tends to be in rarer forms such as celle[8] (celle, le celle and la celle) instead of celui, les celles instead of ceux, and chacune instead of chacun. It is also noteworthy that there appears to be a tendency, not only among English-dominant children in Toronto and Sudbury, but also among French-dominant children in Sudbury and Rayside and the monolingual children in Quebec to overgeneralize the masculine pronoun in the plural to instances where all the referents are female. One of the Grade 2 Quebec children, for example, says:...mes soeurs, eux, y'ont...i' sont allés. This kind of overgeneralization may also be noted for inanimate referents, and it may be suspected that it has dialectal status in Canada (cf. Pupier and Pelchat, 1972). Including animate and inanimate referents, a total of 9 such instances occur in the interviews with French-dominant or monolingual children.

The existence of Rule 1 for the majority of children interviewed (the only possible exceptions being among the Grade 2 immersion children) is easily confirmed by the fact that they do, in most cases, refer to males in the masculine gender and females in the feminine gender. Further confirmation of the existence of the rule may be adduced from some overgeneralizations, in which the children 'correct' the gender of a noun to correspond to the sex of the referent. La police or une police (a Canadian French substitute for un policier) becomes le police or un police, le petit Chaperon Rouge become la petite Chaperon Rouge. Among the immersion children, we find that there is a tendency to use a more general masculine noun (e.g. chat, chien rather than chatte or chienne) as a common noun, so that when the re-

Table 3

Non-standard contraventions of Rule 1

	Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Quebec
Grade 2					
Total no.	64 (8.4%)*	17 (1.8%)	-	5 (0.4%)	10 (0.5%)
% of masculine contra-ventions	82.8%	82.4%	-	60%	60%
Grade 5					
Total no.	9 (1.5%)	11 (4.3%)	2 (0.2%)	8 (0.5%)	1 (0.1%)
% of masculine contra-ventions	77.8%	90.9%	100%	100%	100%

*Figures in brackets represent the % of such non-standard variants among total instances of gender selection

Examples for Table 3

Grade 2

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside
le petit fille	mes soeurs i va prendre leur bain	---	Wilma pis Betty on dit la celle (male ref.)
mon soeur	un petit fille		y'a demandé pour le (fem. ref) marier
au gran'maman	le maman (cochon		
sa frère	un sorcière		
il marche (fem.ref.)	le loup y a arrivé la première		

Québec

y donne des trophés pour les celles (m & f refs) qu'a plus de points
mes soeurs, eux y'ont...i'sont allées

Grade 5

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside
j'étais petit (female speaking)	des s' petites hommes i'veut pas, i' voulait (juste...(fem.ref)	y a été le (fem.ref) chercher	y (fem.ref) est resté
mon maman	un tit fille	à mes tantes des fois, s'i'n'auraient besoin	y'étaient (fem. ref) pas contente

Québec

i'sont pas toutes habillées en soeur (fem.ref.)

ferent is female the noun becomes feminine (une chat, ma chien). Another interesting 'error' made by some immersion and Sudbury children is to use the unmarked masculine form in 'neutral' instances where the sex of the referent is unknown (e.g. le personne instead of la personne). This form, we may surmise, is encouraged by the unmarked status of masculine gender in French (see p. 137). Table 4 lists the instances of the above types of overgeneralization for each group.

Table 4

Overgeneralizations of Rule 1

Grade 2				
Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Quebec
4(0.5%)	4(0.4%)	1(0.2%)	3(0.2%)	---
un personne	un police	un police	la petite Chaperon Rouge	
ma chien	au police			
un professeur français	un police		le police	
une chat	le police			

Grade 5				
Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Quebec
3(0.5%)	3(1.1%)	---	---	---
une chat	un personne			
ma chat	le personne			
un personne	le personne			

Rule 2. *Nouns with the endings* - [zɔ̃], [sjɔ̃], [zjɔ̃], [tjɔ̃], [ite] *are feminine in gender. Nouns ending with* [ɔ̃] *or* [jɔ̃] *preceded by any other consonant are masculine.*

Table 5 lists the contraventions of Rule 2 that are found in the interviews with children in the various groups. It is clear that this rule is rarely contravened by French-dominant or monolingual French children, and where it is contravened by these children, we can in several instances see other trends at work. Thus avion begins with a vowel (see pp. 135 to 136) and the i' of i'sont refers to a plurality of feminine objects. The immersion and English-dominant Sudbury children, on the other hand, appear to make errors that are not motivated by such considerations, though in Grade 5 the tendency to overgeneralize the masculine is clear. This tendency may be encouraged by the trend captured in Rule 4 (see below). Only one overgeneralization of Rule 2 may be noted, in which an English-dominant Sudbury child in Grade 2 uses the form le prison instead of la prison.

Table 5

Contraventions of Rule 2

Grade 2

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)
4 (0.5%)	4 (0.4%)	
le maison	sa bonbon	---
du maison	un maison	
une garçon	une grosse capuchon	
une garçon		

Rayside	Québec
2 (0.2%)	10 (0.5%)
la petite Chaperon Rouge	elle est pas très belle (l'avion)*
	y était trop solide (la maison)
	i'sont toutes (les émissions)

Grade 5

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)
11 (1.8%)	3 (1.2%)	---
mon maison	un petit composition	
le télévision	un maison	
du télévision		
petit télévision		
grand maison		
le télévision	Sudbury (bal.bil)	
un autre maison	2	
tout mon question	une grosse grosse avion	
c'est le mien (maison)		
on rent un (maison)		
le électricité		

Rayside	Québec
1 (.06%)	---
(émissions) anglais	

*Six other references to avion were also in the feminine (see Table 7). However, the indefinite article is transcribed as un, indicating possible neutralization (see pp. 135-136). Avion is also feminine in some European French dialects.

Rule 3. *Names of sciences are feminine.*

Table 6 shows the contraventions to Rule 3 found among the Grade 5 children. (Such nouns did not occur in most Grade 2 interviews). It is clear that Rule 3 is rarely contravened except by the immersion children, who almost invariably used masculine gender for sciences (only one immersion child said la géographie and la mathématique (in the singular). The immersion children's lack of control of this perhaps rather 'advanced' rule of gender attribution in French may be seen as part of their general tendency to overgeneralize the masculine (see Rule 1 above and Rule 5 below)

Table 6

Contraventions of Rule 3

Grade 5

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (F/E)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Quebec
12 (1.9%)	---	1	---	1(.06%)	---
le grammaire		le mathématique		le littérature	
le grammaire					
le science					
le gymnastique					
le grammaire					
on fait de le (géographie)					
le science					
le historie					
le grammaire					
au gymnastique					

Rule 4. *Inanimate nouns ending in a vowel (oral or nasal) or the semi-vowel* [j] *are masculine.*

Table 7 lists the non-standard deviations from this rule found in each group of children. Interestingly we find no such deviations among the Grade 2 immersion children, perhaps becuase of their overriding tendency to overgeneralize the masculine. Among the Grade 5 immersion children and the Grade 2 English-dominant Sudbury children, we find a number of non-standard deviations, including several nouns of relatively high frequency in everyday French (e.g. mois, jardin). Among the French-dominant and monolingual children we find, in contrast, that most of the non-standard variants occur in nouns beginning with a vowel. Among those beginning with a consonant are relatively uncommon nouns such as tombeau and reflet, the latter with the 'ambiguous' ending [e] (see p. 133). It is also of note that lit is feminized in a number of instances, and that Rigault (1971:84) reports that only 24.6% of nouns ending in [i] are masculine in the Petit Larousse.

Table 8 shows that there is a greater tendency among the immersion and English-dominant Sudbury children to overgeneralize Rule 4 than there is among the French-dominant children. It is not clear whether this tendency

Table 7

Non-standard contraventions of Rule 4

Grade 2

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)
---	7 (0.7%)	---
	un grosse grosse trou la jardin sa bonbon une numéro une grosse capuchon le lit c'était trop douce	

Rayside	Québec
3(0.2%)	11 (0.5%)
une gros tombeau celui-là est trop molle (un lit) la celle (le lit)	elle est pas très belle (avion) elle peut pas voler 'est en bois la faire rouler d'la faire voler, 'est trop pesante une petite abri la même habit je la garderais (l'argent)*

Grade 5

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (bal.bil)
8(1.3%)	---	3
une mois cette chapeau ma piano de la tissu une grande lit de la émail une pays		une grosse grosse avion la capot

Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Québec
---	3 (0.2%)	3 (0.1%)
	la reflet je la collecte (l'argent)* je va la garder (l'argent)*	la même habit je la mettrais (l'argent)* je la dépenserais pas (l'argent)* c'était pas une grosse (incendie)

*L'argent is also commonly feminine in popular European French.

Table 8

Non-standard overgeneralization of Rule 4

Grade 2

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside
10 (1.3%)	15 (1.6%)		4 (0.3%)
un fois	un poupée	---	un fois
le maison	le prison		(émissions)anglais
au Nova Scotia	le cheminée		de le remettre
son main	un fois		(une dent)
l'eau est trop froid	un fois		on le laisse
du maison	un maison		(la dent)
l'eau est froid	l'eau chaud		
son main	du bouillie*		
le main	le bouillie		
on fait de le (géog.)	c'était juste froid pis chaud (la bouillie)		
	le bouillie		
	mon bouillie		
	tout mon bouillie		

Québec

3 (0.1%)

i'sont toutes (les émissions)
y était trop solide (la maison)
le rue

Grade 5

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside
22(3.6%)	4(1.6%)	1(0.1%)	---
E.g.	un p'tit composition	du tapisserie	
le rue	un maison		
mon maison	un caméra		
au Turquie			
le première fois			
tous les nuits			

Québec

3 (0.1%)

en avait un (auto, y avait pas fait son stop
le rue

* Un bouillie (m.) is heard in adult Canadian French usage

should be interpreted as meaning that Rule 4 does therefore in some sense exist for these children, or whether it should once again be regarded as part of a general tendency to overgeneralize masculine gender. As we shall see with reference to Rule 5 below, the latter interpretation is probably the most likely one.

Rule 5. *Inanimate nouns (and lesser or exotic animals) ending in a consonant are feminine.*

Rule 5 is the obvious corollary of Rule 4. As can be seen from Table 9, the immersion children and the English-dominant Grade 2 Sudbury children use numerous non-standard variants that contravene this rule, and these contraventions affect nouns of an everyday kind that can be assumed to be relatively frequent in French. Contraventions by the Grade 5 English-dominant Sudbury children are not as frequent but still appear to apply to relatively common nouns. Among the French-dominant children, we find generally few contraventions, and where these occur, we may suspect that there are often other influences at work. For example, the masculinization of chose and affaire (note initial vowel) may reflect the tendency already evident in the use of pronouns to use a 'neutral' masculine form to refer to an object or event unspecified as to gender. The masculinization of marelle and balle molle by the Rayside children may be influenced by the fact that many borrowed names of sports including 'le baseball', 'le football' and le hockey' are masculine in French. In general, we find that contraventions to this rule follow a pattern: most contraventions by the immersion and English-dominant Sudbury Grade 2 children, the next most contraventions by the English-dominant Grade 5 Sudbury children, the Rayside children still using some non-standard variants, and the French-dominant Sudbury children and those from Quebec using virtually none.

Overgeneralizations of Rule 5 are nowhere near as common among the immersion and Grade 2 English-dominant Sudbury children as are their contraventions of this rule, suggesting that Rules 4 and 5 may not in fact be operating for these groups, but only the general tendency to overgeneralize the masculine. In contrast, the occurrence of occasional overgeneralizatios (some involving nouns beginning with a vowel) beside a generally low incidence of contraventions among the French-dominant and monolingual French groups tends to suggest that they may be adhering to the general rule outlined by Guiraud (see p. 135). Table 10 summarizes overgeneralizations of Rule 5.

What conclusions can be drawn from the above positing of rules with contraventions and overgeneralizations? Obviously only rather tentative ones, since we have been dealing exclusively with 'errors' and have not taken into consideration any detailed analysis of the 'correct' forms that the children use in conformity with the posited rules. If they use virtually no 'correct' forms but make numerous errors (as was noted in the case of Grade 5 immersion for names of sciences) then a more definitive statement can be made as to their adherence or non-adherence to a particular rule. The analysis of correct forms would therefore appear to be a desirable follow-up to this study. At the same time, further detailed analysis is needed to take account of the extent to which gender distinctions may have been avoided in the children's speech. In the Grade 5 immersion transcripts, for example, it is

Table 9

Non-standard contraventions of Rule 5

Grade 2

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Québec
39(5.1%)	47(5.0%)	1(0.2%)	4(0.3%)	1(.05%)
E.g.	E.g.			
un carotte	un corde	le carotte	un chose	le chose
un tasse	un minute		un chose	
le cage	un chose		le chose	
le porte	un table tout'plein		au crique	
un vase	un cloche			
le table	le viande			
le cuisine	le chaise			
du confiture	un salle de manger			
le jambe	le carotte			
un rose	ce soupe est trop chaud			
classe français	ce chambre			
	un gros bouche			
du limonade	des grands roches			
le soupe	celui-là (une pomme)			

Grade 5

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Québec.
61 (9.9%)	6 (2.4%)	---	10(0.6%)	2(0.1%)
E.g.	mon bicyclette		un caravane	les tentes, y' étaient...
le grammaire	un jambe		le littérature	cinque auto- mobiles, y'ont rentré.
tout le classe	un soucoupe de volant		au marelle	
du laine	un semaine		pour qu'elle soit plus petit (la balle)	
au bibliothèque	un valise			
lignes français	le chambre de bains			
le patinoire			au balle molle	
le glace			un petit affaire	
le sorte			un des chutes	
le balle			un corde	
une robe blanc			un planète	
un piscine			les baleines, c'est les plus gros	
un petit tête				
le poule				
à le droite				

Table 10

Overgeneralizations of Rule 5

Grade 2

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbruy (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Québec
5(0.7%)	2(0.2%)	1(0.2%)	1(0.1%)	2(0.1%)
une sac	la singe	une costume	une mammouth	des grosses chênes
une sac	la cuivre			une vieille hôpital
la sac				
la sac				
une sandwich				

Grade 5

Toronto (Imm)	Sudbury (Eng.dom)	Sudbury (Fr.dom)	Rayside	Québec
8(0.7%)	---	2(0.2%)	1(.06%)	1(.05%)
une livre blanche		la méchante or	la sud	la rivage
une triangle		une grosse hôtel		
une verre				
une filme				
cette costume				
une différente cône				

occasionally noted that there is apparent neutralization of the phonological distinction between the vowels in the definite articles le and la to an approximation of the low centralized vowel [ʌ]. This phenomenon, which was ommitted from any tallies wherever it was noted in the transcripts, suggests two possibilities: (1) a communication strategy of avoidance, or (2) phonological interference from the mother tongue, in that English a tends to become [ʌ] in unstressed position (e.g. sofa [sofʌ]), but in French, the phonetic distance between [lə] and [lʌ] is insufficient to maintain the morphological gender distinction. A further instance of avoidance and/or interference from English in the immersion interviews may occur in the use of pronouns. A close analysis of the interviews of two Grade 5 immersion students reveals that they do not use il or elle as subject pronouns to refer to inanimate objects where a native speaker would, preferring instead the 'neuter' pronoun ce or ça, which enables them to avoid making a gender distinction, and which closely resembles their use of it in English.

Despite these complications, a few tentative conclusions may be drawn from this study which would seem to indicate that there is a trend from what can be regarded as an early stage of gender acquisition on the part of the Grade 2 immersion students to virtually complete mastery on the part of the French-dominant and monolingual French children even in Grade 2. It is only among the Grade 2 immersion children that we find massive overgeneralization of masculine forms in the singular to refer to female higher beings. Where such overgeneralization occurs among the French-dominant and monolingual children, it applies exclusively to pronouns, and usually to plural pronouns which are attested forms in Canadian French. In between the Grade 2 immersion children and the French-dominant children, we find the Grade 5 immersion and Sudbury English-dominant children at a stage where they still make the occasional error even when the animate noun is present (e.g. le petit fille, mon maman) in the same noun phrase. In the light of Lyons' comments about the dominance of grammatical gender within the noun phrase (see p. 131), it would appear that such errors are in some sense more serious than, for example, lack of concord in pronominal reference or in the predicate adjective.

It is clear from Table 8 and 9 that both immersion age groups and the Sudbury English-dominant children in Grade 2 are frequently overgeneralizing masculine gender in inanimate nouns too. By Grade 5, there is less such overgeneralization on the part of the English-dominant Sudbury children, though it is still more evident than among French-dominant or monolingual children. It appears that overgeneralization of the masculine may be representative of an early stage of both first and second language acquisition of French (cf. Grégoire's finding,(p. 137), gradually giving way to the use of the marked feminine form first with reference to female sex and then more generally to inanimate objects too. However, Tables 5 and 7 indicate that there is also a certain amount of apparently random use of the feminine by the Grade 2 and 5 immersion and the Sudbury Grade 2 English-dominant groups.

Table 6 suggests that the Grade 5 Sudbury English-dominant children have a much better grasp than the Grade 5 immersion group of at least one rule for the use of feminine gender. In the case of Rule 3, however, one has, of course, to recognize that even native speakers may not be aware of a semantic rule of the kind outlined by Grevisse in the same way that they are of a rule that dictates that male beings are masculine in gender and females, feminine. It may be that in Rule 3 we are dealing more simply with a situation in which

the Grade 5 Sudbury children through their greater exposure to French have had more opportunity to 'memorize' the gender of these relatively technical terms. The fact that at least some of the errors made by the Rayside and Quebec children are in relatively infrequent nouns (e.g. mammouth) lends support to the notion that amount of exposure to the noun in question has an important bearing on the mastery of its gender. The relatively small number of non-standard variants evidenced by the French-dominant children in Sudbury and Rayside and by the monolingual children in Quebec, together with the apparently systematically determined nature of some of these variants (e.g. in pronoun forms and nouns with initial vowels), suggest that for these children the amount of exposure they have had to French has been quite adequate for them to have mastered gender distinctions (with occasional 'performance' errors). For the English-dominant Sudbury children, one obvious remedy is for parents to speak more French with their children at home, and thus make them more like the French-dominant children. For the immersion children, however, no such possibility exists for increasing their daily exposure to French. Since gender can be regarded as a mainly redundant aspect of the grammar of French (see p. 131), we may predict that it will continue to pose problems for the immersion children.[9] After all the only improvement that has been noted from Grade 2 to Grade 5 is in the attribution of feminine gender to female referents. This suggests that some remedial action needs to be taken by the schools involved -- action that could also be of benefit to the Sudbury children. Namely, as Tucker et al. and Rivers suggest, there should be an attempt to introduce explicit generalizations about gender attribution in French. The task can be made easier with the support of written French materials, where gender is more often overtly marked than in spoken French.

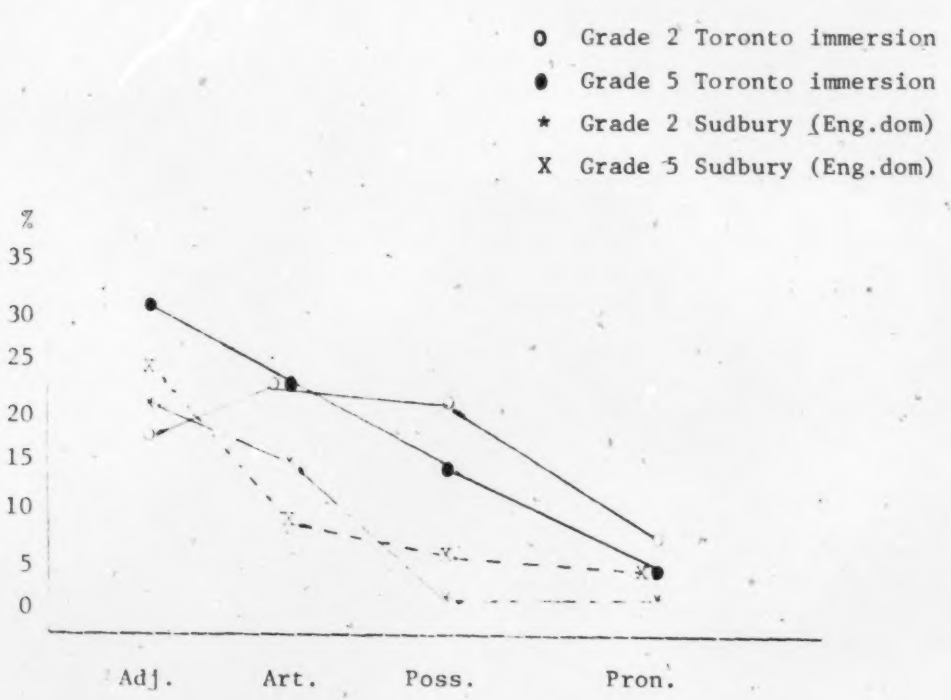
A breakdown of the non-standard variants used by the immersion and English-dominant Sudbury children (see Figure 1) suggests a similar pattern of relative difficulty with gender concord in various parts of speech -- adjectives, articles, possessive adjectives, and pronouns. Except in the case of the Grade 2 immersion children, adjectives appear to be the most problematic area. Perhaps in their case, they had fewer errors in adjectives because they did not use so many different adjectives as the other groups. We may suspect, in some cases at least, that gender errors in adjectival forms occur, not because the child does not know the gender of the noun, but because he is not familiar with the alternate forms of the adjective in question. We find, for example, une robe blanc and un grosse grosse trou. The fact that many adjectives do not have alternate forms in spoken French (see p. 132). coupled with the relative redundancy of gender marking in adjectives, may lead to the overgeneralization of an invariant form. Here again it seems that there may be room for some formal teaching in school. While pronouns appear the least problematical in terms of erros made, one should again take account of the tendency of avoidance mentioned earlier. Number of errors alone is not a sufficient indicator of the difficulty that the children may be having. Teaching that takes into account the gender system of English, and perhaps also the different stress patterns of English and French, appears to be indicated.

Finally, in answer to the questions posed on p. 130 of this paper, it appears that the French-speaking child brought up in a minority situation is potentially like either the monolingual native speaker of French or the

second-language learner. What language his parents use in the home appears to be the deciding factor. It has been suggested here, however, that there is room for remedial action by the school, which could improve the English-dominant child's mastery of French gender.

Figure 1

Proportion of non-standard gender variants in different parts of speech



Note

The percentage figures represent the proportion of non-standard variants to total variants in each part of speech given.

Footnotes

* I am most grateful to Raymond Mougeon for valuable suggestions and comments over the course of this study and to Sharon Lapkin for her helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. "L'opposition des genres est utilisée pour distinguer des substantifs homonymes." (Chevalier et al., 1964:164).

2. As examples of distinctive beginning characteristics, Tucker et al cite flor- as feminine and déb- as masculine.

3. It should be noted however, that some masculine nouns did retain final consonants -- for example, those with consonant clusters ending in -r (e.g. LIBRU(M) le livre; PATRE(M) le père). At the same time, some feminine nouns did not (e.g. MANU(M) la main).

4. The interviews with the Sudbury, Rayside and Quebec children, and the transcriptions thereof, were carried out under the auspices of the Franco-Ontarian Centre at OISE. The interviews with the immersion children were carried out and transcribed within the context of the Bilingual Education Project, OISE.

5. Dominant language of communication was assessed by the responses to a series of questions addressed to the children during the course of the interviews (Hébrard & Mougeon, 1975). For further discussion see Mougeon (1979:5).

6. Omitted from this tally of instances of gender selection are ambiguous references, immediate repetitions, and occurrences of 'impersonal' il as in il y a ... Un petite maison counts as two instances of selection.

7. The use of sa rather than son in the above example, however, suggests interference from English, where the form of the singular possessive adjective is determined by the sex of the possessor instead of by the gender of the possessed noun as in French.

8. See Mougeon and Bélanger (1979).

9. In a study of the acquisition of the French verb system, Harley and Swain (1978) found that semantically redundant aspects of the system were not in general acquired by the Grade 5 immersion students.

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